

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7084

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2012

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FOR SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE, SY, US

SUBJECT: ASAD'S CURRENT THINKING ON MILITARY INTERVENTION

REF: DAMASCUS 1985

1. SUMMARY:

WHILE HE IS BEING CAGEY, ASAD HAS PROBABLY SHELVED FOR PRESENT ANY THOUGHT OF OPEN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON. HE UNLIKELY TO SURRENDER THREAT OF INTERVENTION AS PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON BUT MAY DIRECT HIS ENERGIES TO SCHEMES FOR REBUILDING LEBANESE ARMY. END SUMMARY

2. RECOGNIZE THAT YESTERDAY'S REFTEL ON MY MEETING WITH ASAD WILL HAVE STRUCK YOU AS INCONCLUSIVE CONCERNING SYRIA'S INTENTIONS TOWARDS MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON. THE LACK OF DRAMA IN THE MEETING'S ATMOSPHERE WAS ENCOURAGING BUT ASAD AT NO POINT TIPPED HIS HAND ABOUT INTERVENTION. MUCH WILL OBVIOUSLY DEPEND ON DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE NEXT WEEK AND THE ABILITY OF THE LEBANESE TO PULL THEMSELVES TOGETHER.

2. WE ARE PROBABLY OVER THE HUMP ON IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION. (PRESIDENT MAY ALREADY HAVE DECIDED AGAINST THIS WHEN HE HAD KHADDAM APPROACH THE FRENCH LAST SATURDAY.) I FEEL

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PERSONNALLY CONFIDENT THAT INTERVENTION WILL NOT RETURN AS AN

ACTIVE OPTION. BARRING ANOTHER MAJOR BREAKDOWN IN LEBANESE PUBLIC ORDER. CERTAINLY OUR PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND YESTERDAY'S MEETING HERE LEFT PRESIDENT WITH NO DOUBTS ABOUT LIKELY ISRAELI REACTION.

3. FROM HIS PASSING COMMENT THAT THE THREAT OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION HAD ADDED TO EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS POLITICAL INITIATIVES (REFTEL PARA 10), IT IS UNLIKELY ASAD WILL DISAVOW TO ANYONE THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERVENTION. HE MAY, HOWEVER, HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE THREAT OF INTERVENTION COULD SERVE SYRIA'S PURPOSES BETTER THAN THE ACT ITSELF. (YOU MAY THINK IT DESIRABLE FOR ME TO MAKE THIS POINT IN A MEETING I HOPE TO HAVE SHORTLY WITH SHIHABI.)

4. DAMASCUS 1820 OF MARCH 26 REPORTED THAT SARG WAS THEN BRINGING LEBANESE OFFICERS SECRETLY TO A MILITARY CAMP NEAR DAMASCUS AND PROMISING THEM SYRIAN FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL SUPPORT TO UNDERTAKE A COUP. EVENTS HAVE OVERTAKEN THAT PARTICULAR PROJECT BUT I WOULD NOT RULE OUT ASAD'S DECIDING TO PURSUE THE SUBORNING OF LEBANESE OFFICERS IN AN EFFORT TO CREATE THE NUCLEUS OF AN ARMY ON WHICH HE COULD RPLY TO ROUND UP, BY MEANS WHICH MUST BE PRINCIPALLY THOSE OF MORAL SUASION, THE HEAVY WEAPONRY NOW DISPERSED AMONG VARIOUS LEBANESE MILITIA. AS HE STRESSED IN YESTERDAY'S CONVERSATION, THAT IS HIS MAIN PREOCCUPATION AS HE STUDIES HOW TO RESTORE STABILITY WITHIN LEBANON. HE SPOKE AS ONE WHO EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO BE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTION AND AS IF CONVINCED THE LEBANESE, LEFT TO THEMSELVES, WOULD BE INADEQUATE TO THE TASK.

5. IN YESTERDAY'S REFTEL, I FORGOT ONE REACTION WHICH ASAD DID HAVE TO MY TALKING POINTS. HE INTERRUPTED ME ONLY ONCE. WHEN I SAID WE SAW INCREASED RESILIENCY ON THE PART OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS, HE IMMEDIATELY QUERIED IF WE MEANT THAT THEY WERE RECEIVING NEW MILITARY SUPPLIES? I REPLIED MY REFERENCE WAS SOLELY OUR SENSE OF A RENewed FIGHTING SPIRIT AMONG THE CHRISTIANS.

6. SUGGEST PASS TO POSTS WHICH RECEIVED REFTEL.

MURPHY

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